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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7924
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 4979

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000519

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: POSITIVE REACTIONS TO TIP REPORT; SIDES FOCUSED ON
BENCHMARKS

REF: SECSTATE 78631

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a refreshing change from prior years, Cypriots on both sides of the Buffer Zone reacted constructively to the June 12 release of the 2007 TIP Report. Authorities, faced with a fair and factual report (and ranking), publicly admitted the need to combat trafficking in persons and privately offered us their plans to do so. Press coverage focused on the severity of the island's trafficking problem and the need for authorities to do more, a product of careful Embassy outreach. We believe leaders in both communities are close to achieving some long-sought goals: opening victims' shelters, implementing demand reduction campaigns, and passing revised laws and regulations. Greater political will is needed to overcome bureaucratic inertia and suspected vested interests if Cyprus is to succeed in other key areas, however, from curtailing or abolishing the "artiste" work permit category in the south to enacting an anti-TIP law in the north. END SUMMARY.

Diplomatic Reaction to a Second Watch List Ranking

2. (SBU) Charge d'Affaires, a.i., June 12 delivered reftel points and the TIP Report to MFA Political Affairs Director (P equivalent) Ambassador Euripides Evriviades. Evriviades noted the GOC's domestic and international commitments on this issue -- in its May 2005 National Action Plan and to the Council of Europe -- and recognized that "Cyprus has to get these done... with or without American pressure."

3. (SBU) He informed Charge that the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee had just concluded the second reading of the revised comprehensive anti-TIP bill and that it would send it on/about June 19 to the plenary body for action. The bill's passage was "just a matter of time," he commented. On the separate issue of the "artiste" work permit category, Evriviades noted the MFA's initiative (since his December 2006 return from Washington where he was Cyprus's ambassador) to provide these foreign women more control over, and information on, the conditions of their employment. He urged the Embassy to engage the GOC "interagency," particularly anti-TIP coordinator (and Ministry of Interior Permanent Secretary) Lazaros Savvides, in hopes of securing government

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buy-in to further curtail or abolish the category.

4. (SBU) Lastly (and predictably), Evriviades complained about the inclusion of northern Cyprus in the report, requesting, at the least, that the USG refer to the Turkish Cypriot-administered areas as the EU does, i.e., "the areas

of the Republic of Cyprus in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control." Charge took note of his request but replied that we were not inclined to change USG-standard terminology.

New Angles on "Artistes"; Some Low-Hanging Fruit

15. (SBU) Despite the Embassy's request for an earlier meeting, MOI PermSec Savvides agreed to meet PolChief only on June 13 (after the Report's Washington release) to receive reftel points and country narrative. Savvides did not appear particularly "furious" with the assessment, as the "Cyprus Mail" reported earlier the same day, but he did dispute some of its points. The GOC's performance had exceeded what it had promised with its National Action Plan, Savvides initially asserted. He then weakened his own argument, however, by changing "government" to "ministry" -- the MOI had met all its goals, but "it was only a coordinating body and had no action authority for any of the anti-TIP measures promised or undertaken."

16. (SBU) Having expressed sufficient protest and the bureaucratic caveat, Savvides pointed to some areas in which he expected we would see progress soon. He revealed that the GOC intended to make it more difficult for "impresarios" to secure "artiste" work permits for Belorussians, Russians, Moldovans, and Ukrainians, mainly by slow-rolling such applications. If EU nationals, instead, worked in the island's nightclubs, they would not be subject to migration or employment restrictions; their rights of choice and movement would be protected. Savvides also noted that, under the revised anti-TIP legislation, if a foreign woman currently on Cyprus claimed to Welfare Services to be a trafficking victim, that office would alert Migration, which would then be obligated to revoke the prior conditions of

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employment and issue a permit allowing unrestricted employment.

17. (SBU) Savvides confirmed that the revised anti-TIP bill would be voted out of committee the week of June 18. He noted that the GOC was under pressure from the EU to harmonize its TIP legislation with the Acquis. He mentioned that this new legislation would ratchet up penalties for trafficking. Next year's public awareness campaign, therefore, would utilize new posters and T.V. spots mentioning the stiffer penalties and focusing on nightclub clients. He assumed (and we agreed to check if) this would be considered a demand reduction campaign. Avoiding any prediction of an opening date, Savvides reported that the hirings for the government-run shelter in Nicosia had occurred and that the new employees were in training. Lastly, Savvides foresaw continued vigilance and dedication on the part of police and prosecutors, hoping for a steady upward trend in trafficking convictions.

18. (SBU) PolChief June 15 discussed legislative priorities with European Party (EUROKO) MP Nikos Koutsou. Koutsou claimed that EUROKO's short-term priority was to see a revised trafficking in persons law passed soonest. It was not pressure from the United States or the European Union that had convinced his party to target TIP, but rather the severity of the problem and the moral necessity of tackling it. Although not on the committee currently considering the bill, he promised his personal support to seeing it become law.

Turkish Cypriots: Request for Political Pressure

19. (SBU) Poloff met June 14 with "MOI Under Secretary" Ali Alnar to present the Turkish Cypriot (T/C) administration

with a copy of the TIP Report. Like Savvides, Alnar noted that, as "anti-TIP coordinator," he had little executive power over action "agencies." He admitted that even he, until recently, had confused trafficking with smuggling, and apologized for the lack of progress on the issue. He seemed bewildered as to which of the many anti-TIP initiatives previously discussed with Poloffs should be a priority, and launched into a laundry list of actions/intentions that he hoped would suffice. Alnar announced that T/C authorities had stopped approving new "barmaid" work permits, driving out of business all but a couple of the known disreputable pubs; the T/C administration would try to improve, via an amendment to the permit regulations, the working conditions of "artistes"; and a public awareness campaign was in the works, which would inform "artistes" of these new rights. He also claimed that T/C authorities were open to the idea of a shelter, and had spoken with the local NGO T/C Human Rights Foundation about cooperating on such, but were at a loss on what would be the implementing steps. Lastly, without providing details, he promised to improve the toll-free victims' hotline.

¶10. (SBU) Poloff encouraged the forward movement (or the intention of such), but also highlighted the Report's two recommended measures: (1) passage of a comprehensive anti-TIP law (the north has none) and (2) training of police and other first responders on how to identify victims. Focusing on the most fundamental of steps, i.e., an anti-TIP law, Alnar threw up his hands. He said that the "MOI" did not have any legal or technical experts, and, moreover, he had no authority to direct those expert "agencies" to start the legislative drafting process. Laced with a warning that T/C efforts would receive increasing scrutiny, Poloff provided the example of Turkey's anti-TIP law as a possible model, one which the T/C authorities could merely "cut and paste." Exhausted of excuses, Alnar committed to pass it along and push for an anti-TIP law, but requested -- if the USG were truly interested in seeing progress -- that we approach "President" Mehmet Ali Talat for movement on this specific point.

Press and Public Comments

¶11. (SBU) The first press accounts (June 13) of the TIP report were superficial, focusing on the USG's criticism of Cyprus, not its trafficking problem. Media coverage changed significantly after the Embassy's Political and Public Affairs Sections conducted press roundtables in both communities later that day. In them, Embassy staff walked

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journalists through our anti-TIP legislation, the tier system, our information-gathering process, and the method with which we rank countries. To defuse the expected "why don't you rate yourself" criticism, we also provided copies of the most recent Department of Justice evaluation of USG anti-TIP efforts at home. Articles the following day targeted the severity of the trafficking problem and the need for authorities to take greater measures. The normally combative GOC Spokesman Vasilis Palmas uncharacteristically told media June 14 that Cyprus acknowledged deficiencies in its approach to confronting TIP. In the north, leading daily "Kibris's" lead story called trafficking in persons a "shame for both Turkish and Greek Cypriots."

Comment

¶12. (SBU) As Post has previously reported, both GOC officials and T/C authorities admit to a TIP problem and are willing to take action against it. They recognize the steps that still need to be taken. And they have already expended a considerable amount of political capital as well as time and

money to achieve some notable results. Consistent with Cyprus's Tier 2 Watch List status, however, they must do more. Post has made clear to the GOC that the "artiste" category must be severely curtailed or, better yet, abolished if Cyprus hopes to escape the Watch List. Yet, we might not want to fixate on terminology or the existence of the above-named classification. Instead, we suggest focusing on whether these foreign women enjoy and can employ basic rights -- to change employers and/or employment sectors, for example -- which may be achievable through legal/regulatory changes in the category. In the Turkish Cypriot-administered area, Post will raise at the highest levels the necessity of enacting anti-trafficking legislation, possibly based on Turkey's law, as the first step in successfully combating TIP. We should expect, though, to receive soon a T/C request for technical assistance on drafting legislation and/or training police and other first responders.

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